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Romans 10:9-10: Going Beyond SALVATION Slogans



WHY DOES

God

DEMAND

Worship?

Part 2

NEW Family
Devotional Book



Overall Context of Romans

Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome in approximately A.D. 56-57⁵ is all about how the perfectly holy and just Creator lovingly and powerfully saves sinners—making sinners righteous—by means of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus. Apart from God's heavenly plan to justify sinners through Jesus' free-will sacrifice (Romans 1:16-17; 5:6-11), there is no hope for anyone (3:10,22-23), even for the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, to whom was given the Law of Moses (2:1-3,17-24; 3:9-10,19-20). Though the Law of Moses had (and still has—15:4) some great benefits,⁶ it cannot save lawbreakers from the eternal consequences of sin (6:23).

Justification (i.e., being found “not guilty,” but “righteous” by God our Judge) is only through faith *in Jesus*, not trusting in the Law of Moses (or any other law) or in one's ability to obey it perfectly. Only Jesus obeyed the Law of Moses flawlessly (5:18-19; 8:3-4; Hebrews 4:15); only Jesus, His perfect holiness, and His death on our behalf would appease the justice of God (3:23-26; 5:6-9); and only Jesus saves, not the law (cf. Acts 4:12). “[W]hat the law could *not* do...*God did* by sending His own Son” (Romans 8:3).⁷ “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). Indeed, Jesus “justifies” (8:33), not the Law of Moses. Yet so many first-century Jews, tragically, were putting their confidence in the Law rather than in Jesus.

Immediate Context of Romans 9-11

Paul was “an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (11:1), and it distressed him with “great sorrow and continual grief” (9:2) that so many of his countrymen were lost in sin. He was so grieved by their stubborn⁸ commitment to the Law of Moses

IT is quite common in religious discussions—especially with those in various denominations within Christendom—to hear someone say, “All you have to do to be saved is accept Jesus into your heart,” or, “Just say the sinner's prayer and you will be saved.” Often accompanying such statements is a quick citation of Romans 10:9-10:¹ “[I]f you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Do these beautiful words from Romans 10 mean that sinners only need to confess a belief in Jesus to be saved? Does this passage mean that repentance and baptism are unnecessary for salvation? Do these verses teach that to become a Christian, we merely “Pray this Prayer: Dear Jesus, I am a sinner. I believe that You died and rose from the dead to save me from my sins. I want to be with you in heaven forever. Jesus forgive me of all my sins that I have committed against You. I open my heart to You now and ask You to come into my heart as my personal Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen”?²

ROMANS IN CONTEXT

THE Bible is not hard to understand,³ but we are as unlikely to properly interpret an isolated biblical statement as we are to open a random 9,000-word letter,⁴ skip to the middle of it, read a couple of sentences, and accurately know what the author was communicating. Someone may misunderstand the statement, “I've been hiding it from everyone, even my wife, for the past three months. I hope she doesn't suspect anything,” to mean that a man is being unfaithful to his wife. In reality, the husband is going to great lengths to plan an elaborate surprise birthday party for his cherished spouse.

A visitor to a local high school may walk by a classroom where two people are intensely arguing and think, “If someone doesn't intervene, I'm going to have to. I can't believe the teacher is tolerating such behavior.” However, upon further investigation, the passerby realizes the two individuals are in a drama class practicing their lines for an upcoming theatrical performance. Additional information and proper context are two of the most fundamental, key components to correctly understanding anything in life. From letters to lectures and from books to news reports, additional (and especially contextual) information is vital to a fair and accurate interpretation.

rather than to Jesus that he selflessly wrote: “I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh” (9:3).

In Romans chapters 9-11, Paul detailed in no uncertain terms that, while many Jews have rejected God’s plan to save sinners through Jesus, many Gentiles “have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith” (9:30), just as the Jews’ Holy Scriptures prophesied (9:25-26; 10:19-20). The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is God’s power to save Jews and non-Jews (1:16). “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘*whoever* calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (10:12-13). Sadly, rather than receiving Jesus as the cornerstone of their salvation, most Jews trusted in their law-keeping and in their expectations of a Messiah Who would reaffirm their own righteousness. In doing so, they stumbled over the Savior and stubbornly refused to acknowledge Him as the Deliverer of their souls (9:30-33).

In the middle of this hard-hitting section⁹ are the beautiful, deeply meaningful words of Romans 10:9-10: “[I]f you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

5 THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN READING ROMANS 10:9-10

ROMANS 10:9-10 was not meant to be a stand-alone, all-encompassing, quick, shallow, “accept Jesus into your heart,” altar-call-type salvation incantation. Just as Israel misunderstood the purpose of the Law of Moses and the very Messiah it pointed to, many professed Christians enthu-

siastically quote Romans 10:9-10, yet “not according to knowledge” (cf. 10:2). When stripped from its context and reduced to more of a slogan, these verses are dangerously, if not fatally, misunderstood¹⁰ to mean that repentance and/or baptism are not required to become a Christian and that a life of continued submissive obedience to Christ may be unnecessary.

To correctly understand Romans 10:9-10, we must allow the Bible to explain the Bible¹¹—both in Romans and within the entire biblical message of salvation. If the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then it will be internally consistent with itself about whatever it teaches,¹² including about being saved from our sins and living a faithful Christian life.

#1—Recognize What Paul Is and Is Not Contrasting

In Romans 9-11, Paul is contrasting Jews and Gentiles (i.e., their rejection and acceptance of Jesus), law and faith, works and grace (11:6), as well as stumbling (in unbelief) and standing (by faith—11:20). The Jews were doing things *their way* while God was calling them to submit to *His way*—through Jesus (10:3-4). If non-Christian Jews wanted to be saved, they had to move from an *unbelief and denial* of Jesus...to a knowledgeable, heartfelt *belief* in and *confession* of Him.

Neither in Romans 10 nor anywhere else in Romans is Paul contrasting belief and repentance, or confession and baptism, or faith in and obedience to Jesus—as if repentance, baptism, and obedience to God are unnecessary. In Romans 10, Paul was focusing on the Jews’ rejection of Jesus, the very One they needed to acknowledge to be saved. Until they came to a proper understanding of Who *Jesus* was, they were lost.

To illustrate, consider the case of a doctor who must try to convince

his extremely skeptical patient that he is seriously ill and needs a specific medicine that the doctor is prescribing in order to live. The doctor is not immediately concerned with the details of the treatment plan—how often to take the pills, how many at a time, what time of day, or with or without food. *None of that matters if the currently stubborn patient will not first accept that he’s sick and needs the cure.* Similarly, Paul knows that if Jews want to be saved from their spiritual sickness, they must first understand and acknowledge Who the Answer is: Jesus. Otherwise, nothing else matters.

#2—Consider Paul’s Parallel Use of “Faith” and “Obedience”

While Paul contrasted several ideas in Romans 10, he also utilized some notable terms and concepts in important *complementary* ways, specifically faith and obedience, which many “faith-alone,” “just-accept-Jesus-into-your-heart” advocates are resistant to connect. Yet Paul did. Romans 10 verses 9-10 are bookended within Romans 10 and within the letter of Romans as a whole by evidence signifying that obedience to Jesus and confessed faith in Jesus are perfectly harmonious. That is, it’s not one without the other(s); they go together. A confessed faith is an obedient faith.

Paul noted at the beginning of the chapter how the Jews “*did not know* the righteousness of God”; “they *did not submit* to God’s righteousness” (10:3, NIV). This lack of submission underscores that true faith is not merely an intellectual assent but involves a willful alignment with God’s righteousness—a **submissive obedience that flows from genuine belief**. The reason, for example, that the Old Testament “priests of the Lord”—Hophni and Phinehas (sons of Eli)—were said to “*not know* the Lord,” is because they did not submit to His sover-

eign Will—they “were corrupt” (1 Samuel 1:3; 2:12). Indeed, only those who sincerely *submit* to God are those who really *know* Him (i.e., *believe* in Him).

Later in Romans 10, Paul wrote that though the Gospel is preached, “they have not all *obeyed* the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has *believed* our report?’” (10:15-16). Some 700 years before Paul, Isaiah had uttered these words, prophesying that many Jews would not believe in the Messiah when He came (Isaiah 53:1; cf. John 12:37-38). Paul noted the fulfillment of Isaiah’s words and paralleled the Jews’ *disbelief* with *disobedience*. Those who had not “*believed*” were those who had “not all *obeyed* the gospel.” The apostle John similarly connected these important concepts: “Whoever *believes* in the Son has eternal life; whoever does *not obey* the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36, ESV).

Furthermore, in Romans 1:5 Paul began this epistle exalting the resurrected Jesus, saying, “[T]hrough Whom we received grace and apostleship for *obedience of faith* among all the nations for his name’s sake” (WEB). Paul then concludes the epistle with the same allusion to obedient faith,¹³ noting that the Gospel had been “made known to all nations for the *obedience of faith*” (16:26, KJV). To be *obedient* to the faith is to *believe* the Gospel; to *believe* the Gospel is to obey Jesus. If we want to be saved, we must “obey the Gospel.”

#3—Investigate the Meaning of “Obeying the Gospel”

Indeed, in the very chapter of Romans so frequently misused to teach that a sinner must just “accept Jesus into your heart” to be saved or to “say the sinner’s prayer,” Paul references *obeying* the Gospel, specifically referring to those Jews

who “have not all obeyed the gospel” (10:16). But what does it mean to “obey” the Gospel? Ask the average person on the street who claims an affiliation with some denomination if he or she has “obeyed the Gospel,” and you will likely get a blank stare or perhaps a suspicious, confused look. Why? It seems that very few denominations use this biblical terminology,¹⁴ much less impress upon hearers the heavenly requirement—to “obey the Gospel.”

Paul used this same terminology in his second epistle to the church in Thessalonica in a very sobering context. Referring to the return of Jesus at the end of time, Paul wrote that the Lord would be “revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not *obey the gospel* of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). The apostle Peter also used this language in his first epistle, asking, “what will be the end of those who do not *obey the gospel* of God? Now ‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’” (1 Peter 4:17-18; cf. Proverbs 11:31). If, as Peter and Paul clearly indicate, “obeying the Gospel” is directly tied to our eternal destiny, then everyone needs to know the Gospel and how to obey it! Thankfully, Paul specifically addressed this vital subject matter earlier in his epistle to the Romans.

In Romans 6:17-18, Paul wrote about the point in time in which the Roman Christians had originally “obeyed” the Gospel (when they initially left their previous lives of sin and became children of God—servants of God). “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you *obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine* to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” What is this doctri-

nal “form” (or “figure,” “model,” or “pattern”)¹⁵ that slaves of sin “obeyed from the heart” in order to become “slaves of righteousness”—to become Christians? *Is it not what Paul had only just discussed in the immediate context of Romans 6?*

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (6:1-11).

The Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). And this Good News—that a holy, just, and loving God makes sinners right[eous] through Jesus’ sacrificial death and resurrection—is the “form” or “pattern” that sinners “obey.” Paul clearly outlines in Romans 6 *how* the Christians in Rome had “obeyed from the heart that *form* of doctrine”; they “obeyed” the death, burial, and res-

urrection of Jesus. Specifically, Paul, looking back on their obedience to the Gospel, indicated that when, as sinners, they were “baptized into Christ Jesus,” they “were baptized into His death.” “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). Contextually speaking, “obey[ing] from the heart that form of doctrine” is being immersed into the watery grave of baptism, dying to the old man of sin, and rising from spiritual death (through the power of Jesus’ resurrection) as a new person, no longer a servant of sin, but a slave to the righteousness of God.

#4—Acknowledge the Foolishness of Isolating Bible Verses to the Exclusion of Others

“Are you saying that *all* a person must do to obey the Gospel is be baptized in water?”

“Not at all.”

“But you just said that when sinners are baptized into Jesus they become Christians.”

“According to Romans 6, being immersed in water is the actual point at which sinners become followers of Christ—when we sincerely die to the old man of sin and rise with Christ as a new spiritual creation of God in Christ Jesus.”

“But what about Romans 10:9-10?”

“Great question. Let’s talk more about Romans 10 and other New Testament passages.”

If a person is using the exclusionary, “this-verse-says-it-all” interpretation method (e.g., referring to Romans 10:9-10 to suggest that “all” a sinner must do to be saved is believe and confess Jesus), then it begs the question: *What about other verses that say something different?*

The fact is, various verses just before and after Romans 10:9-10 emphasize faith *without mentioning confession*:

- 9:32—The Jews were still lost because they did not seek righteousness “by *faith*.”
- 9:33—“[W]hoever *believes* on Him [Jesus] will not be put to shame” (cf. Isaiah 28:16).
- 10:4—“Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who *believes*” (NIV).
- 10:11—Once again, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16 in reference to salvation found only in Jesus: “Whoever *believes* on Him will not be put to shame.”

There is nothing about the sweet *confession* of Jesus in these verses in Romans, as well as in many other New Testament passages. When the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas in Acts 16: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas said: “*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (16:30-31). When the Jews in Acts 2 asked Peter and the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (2:37-38). All of these verses are as different

from Romans 10:9-10 as Mark 16:15-16, where Jesus said: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” We should no more exclude confession from believing (based upon Romans 9:32-33, 10:4, and 10:11) than we should exclude repentance and baptism from believing and confessing (based upon an isolated reading of Romans 10:9-10).

If the Bible is the inspired Word of God,¹⁶ and if, as the psalmist said to God, “The *entirety* of Your word is truth” (Psalm 119:160), then human beings do not have the authority to dismiss one verse for another. We must “rightly divid[e]” and “accurately handl[e] the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB) and never accept one truth to the exclusion of others.

Most Bible students seem to understand the rationality and importance of this holistic approach to Bible interpretation when considering a host of biblical subjects—from the genealogy of Jesus to His sinless life. Rarely does someone quote from Matthew 1:1 and contend that David and Abraham were the immediate earthly father and grandfather of Jesus, since other

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verses say otherwise. Likewise, virtually no one points to Romans 3:23 and says Jesus must have been a sinner because “all have sinned.” Such verse isolation would be an egregious misuse of Scripture, as Jesus is the one exception among accountable human beings—He never sinned (cf. Romans 8:3; 5:19; Hebrews 4:15).

It is also an egregious misuse of Scripture to contend that God calls sinners to “just accept Jesus into their hearts to be saved” or to “say the sinner’s prayer.”¹⁷ The fact is, Romans 10:9-10 actually proves that “faith alone” does not save, since Paul also detailed how such faith in Jesus Christ must be confessed.¹⁸ “Believing” and “confessing” are two different things, as we learn in John 12:42-43, where “among the rulers *many believed in Him*, but because of the Pharisees *they did not confess Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

Remember that Paul’s emphasis in Romans 10 was on the many Jews who disbelieved that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul was pleading with them to recognize Jesus for Who He is (and Who the Law of Moses said He was; 10:4)—the Rock of our salvation, Who at that time was still “a stumbling stone and rock of offense” to the many Jews who rejected Him (9:33). Logically speaking, there was no more reason to plead with disbelieving Jews to, for example, be baptized than there is today to impress upon Muslims, Hindus, or atheists to be baptized—*if they know nothing about or care nothing about Jesus*. Nothing else matters until Jesus matters! Nothing else means anything until Jesus means everything!

When sinners come to sincerely believe in their hearts and confess with their mouths the Lord Jesus, then they will do exactly what Paul

reminded the Christians in Rome that they had previously done on their way to becoming Christians: “[A]s many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death”; “we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4).

It’s not Romans 6 without Romans 10, any more than it is Luke 24:47 without Mark 16:16 or Acts 2:37-38 without Acts 16:30-31. These verses (and the eternal spiritual truths that they teach) are as harmonious as the different resurrection accounts of Jesus. May we never isolate one passage to the exclusion of other verses, but recognize their perfectly supplemental, complementary nature, whether about the nature of Jesus or how to become a Christian.

#5—To “Call on the Name of the Lord” Means More Than Confessing Christ or Saying the “Sinner’s Prayer”

What did the apostle Paul—the one God used to communicate the marvelous message of Romans—what did *he* do to become a Christian? Paul (formerly Saul the sinner) was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians when Jesus supernaturally appeared to him from heaven. Paul asked Jesus, “What shall I do?” to which Jesus responded, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9:4-6; 22:10). Paul (demonstrating his belief in Jesus) proceeded to Damascus (with some assistance) where he fasted for three days and was “praying” (Acts 9:8-11), awaiting further instructions.

As we see throughout the book of Acts and even as Romans 10:14-15 reminds us, God always uses *people* to teach *people* the Gospel. Even in Paul’s case, God used a man named

Ananias, who said to Paul: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Notice carefully that Ananias, God’s specially chosen messenger to Paul, did not tell Paul that his sins were washed away when Paul spoke to Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4-6), or when he fasted for three days (9:9), *or when he prayed* (9:11). Even though Paul had seen Jesus, talked to Jesus, and sincerely fasted and prayed, he had not yet “called upon the Lord.” Acts 22:16 indicates that he “called upon the Lord” and had his sins washed away by the blood of Jesus *when he took the final step on his way to becoming a Christian—when he was “baptized into Christ Jesus”* (Romans 6:3-4).

Paul’s “calling on the name of the Lord” harmonizes perfectly with what Peter instructed the thousands of people to do in Acts 2. Peter quoted from the prophecy of Joel and told those in Jerusalem on Pentecost that “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21; Joel 2:32). The people in Acts 2 did not understand Peter’s quotation of Joel to mean that a sinner must pray to God for salvation. Their question in Acts 2:37 (“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”) indicates such. Furthermore, when Peter responded to their question and told them what to do to be saved, he did not say, “I’ve already told you what to do. You can be saved by petitioning God for salvation through prayer. Just call on His name.” On the contrary, Peter had to explain to them what it meant to “call on the name of the Lord.” Instead of repeating this statement when the crowd sought further guidance from the apostles, Peter commanded them, saying, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).¹⁹

In Romans 10:13, Paul (like Peter in Acts 2) also quoted from Joel 2:32: “[W]hoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” When we allow “the Bible to explain the Bible,” we will not come to the erroneous conclusion that Paul is commanding the unbelieving Jews in Romans 10 to merely “cry out to the Lord” (cf. Matthew 7:21) or to “pray the sinner’s prayer.” Rather, with Paul’s own conversion in mind (his “calling on the name of the Lord”—Acts 22:16), as well as those on Pentecost (Acts 2), we realize that in Romans 10 Paul is pleading with (especially) the Jews, who “have *not* all *obeyed the gospel*” (Romans 10:16) to “call on the name of the Lord”—that is, to “obey the gospel.” And to “obey the Gospel” is to hear and believe the Gospel (Romans 10:17), to repent of sins (Romans 6:2,6; Acts 2:38), to make the good confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 10:9-10), and to be immersed in water for the remission of sins (Romans 6:3-4; Acts 2:38; 22:16). This is what it means for sinners to “call upon the name of the Lord.”²⁰

CONCLUSION

ROMANS 10:9-10, though often quoted in isolation, must be interpreted in harmony with its immediate and overall context. Paul was not offering a shallow, minimalist formula for salvation. Rather, he was urging hardened, unbelieving Jews to confess the very Messiah they had rejected. Faith and confession are foundational, essential components of salvation, but not exclusive. In Romans—and the entire New Testament—faith, repentance, confession, and baptism are presented as inseparable steps of obeying the blessed Gospel of Christ and beginning one’s all-important journey of walking in the light of the Lord (1 John 1:5-10).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ And perhaps John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:8-9, which we have addressed elsewhere: Eric Lyons (2019), “‘Believing’ in John 3:16,” *Reason & Revelation*, 39[9]:98-101, 104-107, September, <https://apologeticspress.org/believing-in-john-316-5723/>; Eric Lyons (2000), “Ephesians 2:8-9: Contradictory, or Perfectly Consistent,” *Reason & Revelation*, 40[10]:110-113, 116-119, October, apologeticspress.org/ephesians-28-9-contradictory-or-perfectly-consistent-5870/.
- ² This “accept-Jesus-into-your-heart” kind of prayer is typical of what you will hear and read online, in print, and in person among many denominations. This particular wording of the “sinner’s prayer” has circulated widely in social media circles in recent years.
- ³ Some sections may be more difficult than others, but it is not difficult to learn what the Bible teaches about how to become a Christian and how to live the Christian life. Cf. Kyle Butt (2020), “Why Is the Bible So Hard to Understand?” *Reason & Revelation*, 40[4]:38-41, 44-47, April, apologeticspress.org/why-is-the-bible-so-hard-to-understand-5775/.
- ⁴ A typical English translation of Paul’s letter to the Romans is a little over 9,000 words.
- ⁵ In Romans 15:25-26, Paul specifically mentions his upcoming journey to Jerusalem to deliver support from Christians in Macedonia and Achaia to poor saints in Judea (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; Acts 24:17). Thus, this letter was written before that time—apparently when Paul was in Greece on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-3; cf. Romans 16:1-2, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:14).
- ⁶ The commands of God, even commandments under the Law of Moses, are “holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12). After all, the holy, just, and good God was the Author of the Law of Moses. The Old Testament helped the Jews understand sin (3:20). What’s more, it pointed forward to Jesus, the Messiah (10:4).
- ⁷ Emphasis in Bible quotations is added unless otherwise noted.
- ⁸ Romans 2:5; 10:21; 11:7-8.
- ⁹ Chapters 9-11.
- ¹⁰ Cf. 2 Peter 3:14-17.
- ¹¹ Cf. Eric Lyons (2018), “Letting the Bible Explain Itself,” *Reason & Revelation*, 38[8]:86-88, 92-95, August, apologeticspress.org/letting-the-bible-explain-itself-5589/.
- ¹² See Kyle Butt and Eric Lyons (2015), “3 Good Reasons to Believe the Bible Is From God,” *Reason & Revelation*, 35[1]:2-5, 8-11, January, apologeticspress.org/3-good-reasons-to-believe-the-bible-is-from-god-5089/.

[sons-to-believe-the-bible-is-from-god-5089/](https://apologeticspress.org/3-good-reasons-to-believe-the-bible-is-from-god-5089/).

- ¹³ For more information, see Dave Miller (2021), “The Obedience of Faith in Romans,” *Reason & Revelation*, 41[3]:34-35, March, <https://apologeticspress.org/the-obedience-of-faith-in-romans-5955/>.
- ¹⁴ It may be impossible to know with certainty, but general AI inquiries suggest that such language “is not especially common in most mainstream denominations.... It is infrequently used, and sometimes absent.”
- ¹⁵ From the Greek “*tupos*,” Frederick Danker, et al. (2000), *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago), p. 1020.
- ¹⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21. For evidence of the Bible’s divine inspiration, see Kyle Butt (2022), *Is the Bible God’s Word?* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press). See also Dave Miller (2020), *The Bible Is From God: A Sampling of Proofs* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press); Kyle Butt and Eric Lyons (2021), *Defending the Bible* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press); apologeticspress.org/category/inspiration-of-the-bible/.
- ¹⁷ The “sinner’s prayer” for salvation is nowhere found in the New Testament.
- ¹⁸ Cf. 1 Timothy 6:12-13.
- ¹⁹ For more information on why different answers are given in the New Testament to the same basic question (“What must I do to be saved?”), see Eric Lyons (2004), “One Question: Three Different Answers,” apologeticspress.org/one-question-three-different-answers-646/.
- ²⁰ This is not to say becoming a Christian is always synonymous with “calling on the name of the Lord.” Abraham was obviously not baptized into Christ when he “called on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 12:8; cf. 4:26). What’s more, when the New Testament describes people who were already Christians “calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 9:14, 21; 1 Corinthians 1:2), it certainly does not mean that Christians were continually being immersed in water after having been baptized to become a Christian (cf. 1 John 1:5-10). Depending on when and where the phrase is used, “calling on the name of the Lord” may be referring to (1) becoming Christians, (2) worshiping God, or (3) faithful service to the Lord. However, it is *never* used in the sense that all a non-Christian sinner must do to be saved is to cry out and say, “Lord, Lord, save me.” The sinner’s prayer is without biblical backing.

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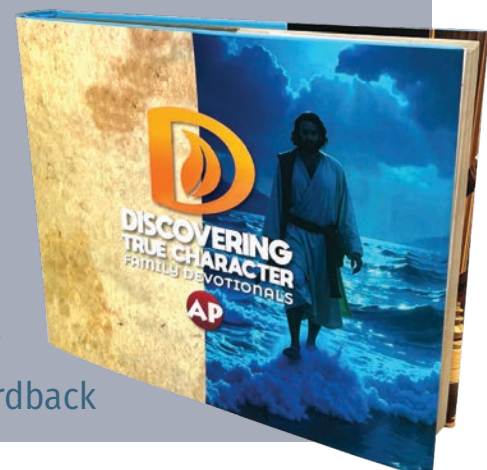


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Why Does God Demand We Worship Him? (Part 2)

Kyle Butt, D.Min.



[EDITOR'S NOTE: Part I of this two-part series appeared in the October issue of R&R. Part II follows below and continues, without introductory comments, where the first article ended.]

SECOND, the Bible is clear that there is only one reason God ever gives humans any commands at all. In Deuteronomy 6:24, Moses wrote: "And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day." According to this verse, God's commandments are always given for the benefit of those who receive them. In 2 Peter 2:3, we read that God's divine power "has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." If God does not need human worship, why then does He so adamantly command it? He commands worship, "for our good always," so we can have everything we need for "life and godliness."

Why Do We Need to Worship God?

With a proper understanding of what the Bible teaches about God, worship, and God's relationship to humans, we can easily answer the initial question, "Why does God demand that we worship Him?" The simple answer is, "Because humans need to worship God in order to experience their best possible life." I think, however, that if this article ended with that answer, the reader would be less than satisfied. What we really want to know

is why is it best for humans to worship God? What is it about the fact that humans need to think and say that God is awesome, almighty, worthy of praise, honor, and glory that helps humans achieve their highest potential?

The answer lies in the fact that it is always best to understand, recognize, and admit the truth of objective reality. Furthermore, a person must recognize objective reality in order to behave in a way that will bring about the most beneficial outcome. We can illustrate this truth in a number of ways.

Imagine that a person needs to cross the Grand Canyon. A failure to recognize and admit the truth of gravity could bring about catastrophic results. Gravity is real. It is powerful. If a person wants to go across the Grand Canyon, a refusal to admit this, or a momentary lapse in judgment, in which this reality is not considered, can be fatal. Now, there are several options that a person has for getting across the

canyon safely. That person could fly across, recognizing that he would need some source of power, such as hot air in a balloon or fuel for a plane. The individual could build a bridge, a rather costly endeavor, but given the time and resources, one that would be effective. Whatever the person chooses, however, he must calculate the Law of Gravity. The second he attempts anything that does not take that reality into account, he is destined for failure. He must think, believe, and understand that gravity is real, powerful, ever present on Earth, and something to remember and think about.

Take the example of the theoretical "Perpetual Motion Machine." You may be aware that the U.S. Patent Office has been forced to refuse to consider all patents for any machine that claims it can run forever without an external source of energy. They have taken this stand because the Second Law of Thermodynamics states, in layman's terms, that all closed systems are moving toward a state of disorder. If no more energy is coming in, and energy is less usable after every energy transaction, then eventually all machines run down. You can imagine a wise engineering professor who has been teaching mechanical engineering for many years explaining this situation to his eager class of new recruits. What does he insist that they recognize

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and learn? There are no perpetual motion machines. The Second Law of Thermodynamics is real. It is powerful. It cannot be broken. Every machine you ever build must admit this truth. He does not want the students to think and say these things *so that the Second Law* feels good about itself. He wants them to admit the truth so that they can build machines that work.

What happens, then, when an objective reality that needs to be recognized and admitted is “housed” in a person? All of us have experienced this to some degree. Imagine you are in a trivia game and there is a sports fanatic on your team. Every sports question he gets right. He has studied sports stats all his life. He collected sports cards from the time he could read. Your team is asked a question about Barry Bonds and the Baseball Hall of Fame. Who does your team want to answer the question? You do not ask the guy who knows science or the girl who has a doctorate in English literature. You turn to the sports guy who insists that he knows the right answer.

Now, I said we have all experienced this “to some degree,” but let’s take our illustration a step further. What if this man actually does know every single fact about every sport ever played? Any actions that failed to recognize this reality could be catastrophic. Imagine your team is asked a sports question worth 10 million dollars. Your teammate confidently says he knows every question about sports that could be asked and insists that you let him answer it. He explains that if you do not, your team will lose 10 million dollars. He is not bragging. He is not trying to force you to build up his ego. He simply wants you to admit the truth that he knows more about sports than you do, so that your team achieves the best outcome.

Any good sports team understands this concept. If there is a person on a football team who is quicker on his feet, more agile, and throws the ball faster and more accurately than anyone else on the team, everyone needs to recognize that he should play quarterback. If those on the team or the coaches refuse to recognize and admit this truth, they will not arrange the team in the best way. When it comes down to the wire, and a 70-yard pass needs to be made, the quarterback would not be bragging to say that he needs the ball and can make the throw better than anyone else on the team. He is simply stating a truth that everyone involved with the team needs to recognize and admit.

Let us shift this discussion slightly and consider how we often train children to think and behave. Imagine a mother is sitting with her child at the park. They are watching the other kids play. One little boy runs past a young girl, bumping her, causing her to fall. He immediately stops, apologizes, and helps her to her feet. The mother might turn to her child and point out the boy’s actions and explain that this is the correct way to behave. When we see laudable, honorable, just, loving, kind, benevolent, wise, competent behavior, we praise it so that it will be imitated. In this case, the child who performed the kind deed may never hear the words of the mother, but both the mother and her child need to recognize and admit the justice and kindness of the action if they want to behave in a just, kind way.

Of course, all illustrations break down at some point and do not provide a perfect analogy to the concept that is being illustrated. These illustrations can help us see, however, that recognizing and admitting reality is the only way to make decisions that will provide the best possible outcome. That being the

case, any attempt to help us understand reality is one that will help us get the most out of life. If it is true that God is all-powerful, a refusal to admit this will only cause us harm. God asks us to understand this, say it to ourselves, to other people, and back to Him, not to stroke His ego, but to help us make the best possible decisions.

You can imagine the engineering professor demanding: Professor: “Say it again class. What must be calculated in all machines?” Class: “The Second Law of Thermodynamics.” Professor: “Why must it be calculated?” Class: “Because it never fails.” Professor: “Where and when does the Second Law work?” Class: “Everywhere in the Universe all the time.” Professor: “What will happen if you forget this Law?” Class: “You will be a terrible engineer!” You can see how this would go. The Second Law does not need us to understand it and “praise” it. We need to understand it in order to function properly in a world where it is a reality.

Does It Seem Like a Little Much?

Even knowing the truth, that we need to recognize objective spiritual reality, some will argue that the repeated insistence by the God of the Bible that humans worship Him is overkill. Why does God feel the need to repeat, over and over, that humans recognize His power, brilliance, and majesty?¹ And if God already knows all this about Himself, why does He require that humans keep repeating back to Him how good, glorious, and awesome He is?

First, God often wants us to express to Him things He already knows. When He asked Adam, “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” (Genesis 3:11), God already knew the answer. Adam needed to confess his sins to God for his, Adam’s, sake, not to provide

God with information. In the New Testament, Jesus taught His disciples to pray and ask God for things such as food and forgiveness. He then explained to them that “your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). God does not need us to inform Him of His majesty. We need to keep repeating it back to Him so we do not lose sight of the truth of it.

Second, the history of humankind reveals that humans come pre-programmed with a religious instinct to worship something. When humans aim their praise and worship toward the wrong entities, it ends in sinful behavior that leads to disaster and destruction. The apostle Paul wrote about how the pagan Gentiles “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things....[A]nd worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Romans 1:23-25). Even with God’s repeated and insistent demand that humans recognize the spiritual objective reality of His all-mighty nature, humans turned their attention to “those which by nature are not gods” (Galatians 4:8).

We can illustrate what happens when a person attributes to something a power it does not have. Imagine a person believing that a dense rock will float. He is standing on the deck of a ship, ties himself to a large rock, and jumps in the water, fully trusting that he will float. His attributing the ability to float to something that does not have that ability could easily cost his life. Or think back to our Grand Canyon example. What if a person believes that a trash bag acting as a cape is stronger than the force of gravity? He jumps off, fully trusting the ability of his plastic cape, yet his “flight” does not end how

he planned. When people worship the wrong entity or idea, they “serve” things that are not the ultimate, all-powerful reality, and it can never lead to their best life.

Modern, enlightened individuals may insist that they do not worship anything. They do not bow down to statues, or anything else for that matter. They believe in themselves, in the power of humanity to do good and make moral progress, and they hope for a better world that will come about when we get rid of religious baggage and traditional monotheistic thought. Try as they may, however, to deny their instinct to worship, they have set up an idol in their hearts—themselves. Moses warned about such self-worship. In his speech to the Israelites, who were going into the land of Canaan, he told them about all the good things God would do for them. They would “eat bread without scarcity” and “lack nothing” (Deuteronomy 8:9). He warned them to beware not to “forget the Lord your God” (8:11). And how would they forget a God who performed miracles, brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand, fed them manna for 40 years, and personally directed them through the wilderness? “[T]hen you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth’” (8:17). Humans cannot bring themselves into existence. They do not have the power to make the Sun rise and set. Humans are so limited that we cannot “add a single hour” to our lives (Matthew 6:27, ESV). How then can we pretend that we are the ultimate reality, responsible for our own success and final destiny? No, when humans put themselves in the place of God, their end is destruction, their god is their appetites, and their glory is in their shame (Philippians 3:19). History has shown that only a constant recognition and repeated recital of God’s reality and true nature grounds a person in the understanding of objective reality.

CONCLUSION

GOD is the ultimate reality. He is infinite in all His attributes. He knows everything, has all power, is all-loving, never makes a mistake, and wants only what is best for His creation. When we recognize and admit these truths, we are able to make the best possible decisions. When we fail to admit these objective spiritual realities to ourselves, to others, and to God, we are arranging our physical and spiritual lives in ways that can only end in catastrophe. “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6).

ENDNOTES

¹ The admonitions are actually scattered over a period of 1,600 years and addressed to many different people.



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**NOTE FROM***The Editor***AP Staff Spotlight: Rob Baker, Graphics Designer**

If you've ever held an AP book or magazine in your hands, worn an AP T-shirt, and just come by the offices for a visit, you've seen the creative fingerprints of Rob Baker.

Rob holds three earned degrees from Freed-Hardeman University: a B.S. in biology (with a minor in chemistry), a B.A. in art (with a minor in Bible), and an M.Ed. If that combination sounds unique, that's because it is—and it's part of what makes Rob such a rare asset in the Kingdom of God. He knows Scripture, understands science, and communicates both through compelling visuals that are biblically sound and graphically striking.

Rob has served as the Graphics Designer at Apologetics Press for the past 21 years. That title alone doesn't do him justice, however. To call Rob "multi-talented" is to vastly understate the breadth of his God-given creativity, work ethic, and contribution to the work of AP.

Rob doesn't just design—he creates. He takes the black and white text of the AP writers and brings the words to life with color and creativity. Whether it's a new children's book, a tract layout, a

video thumbnail, or an artifact display at AP, Rob consistently delivers high-quality work that uplifts and educates man and honors God.

In addition to his full-time work at AP, Rob has also served as the youth minister at the Wetumpka church of Christ for the past 12 years. His love for teaching young people and his ability to connect with them are evident every June, when he serves as the director of AP Camp at ICYC in Oakman, Alabama. If you've never been, imagine a week overflowing with biblical teaching, beautiful singing, and a lot of fun—and a relentlessly energetic camp director who somehow

has more fire on day five than most people do on day one.

Rob is a creative encourager and one of the hardest-working people I've ever known. His impact at AP and on the Kingdom of Christ is immeasurable—not just in the beauty of his designs, but in the strength of his faith and the contagious joy he brings daily to AP and all who know him.

Eric Lyons
Executive Director

